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NSC BRIEFING

29 January 1958

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1-21-80
- I. Venezuela's governing junta has restored relative calm. It has won considerable popular support and at least temporary backing of the armed forces.
- A. The junta is composed of 3 military officers and 2 civilians.
1. Two of the original 5 military appointees resigned on 24 January under civilian pressure because of their connections with the ousted regime.
- B. The junta's cabinet is predominantly civilian and drawn from the professional class.
- II. The junta has already relaxed a number of stringent controls. Its political program calls for the restoration of democratic, constitutional government and free elections within about 18 months.
- A. Two leftist political parties, the Democratic Republican Union (URD) and the Democratic Action (AD), may object to this timetable, feeling they would gain by early free elections.
- B. The three major non-Communist political parties, the URD, AD and Social Christian (OPEI), may find their announced unity of action difficult in practice because of personal ambitions and differences in political orientation.
- C. The armed forces may be reluctant to accept a non-political role, particularly if leftists win a majority voice in government.
1. The military are believed to strongly oppose the legalization of the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) and the indiscriminate return of all political exiles.

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III. The Communists were an important part in the Patriotic Front, a coalition of the four major parties which was prominent in the ouster of Perez.

A. The outlawed PCV, with an estimated 9,000 members and largely inactive for several years, has a political potential beyond its indicated strength.

1. Communists were allowed to maintain some leaders in the labor movement.

2. A top former PCV leader has already returned to Venezuela.

IV. The junta has guaranteed foreign property and investments.

A. The leaders of the three principal non-Communist parties, however, agreed when in exile that the oil concessions granted in 1956-1957 were illegal and should be renegotiated, presumably because they were negotiated by the Perez regime.

1. Leaders of URD and AD, both leftist oriented, also issued statements while in exile denouncing the legality of the concessions.

2. The concessions granted in 1956 and 1957 were the first since 1945 when AD was in power.

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